

Millie–Christine McKoy

Instructions :

After reading the short biography, answer a few questions about the life of Millie–Christine McKoy.

Millie-Christine McKoy was born July 11, 1851, the eighth child of Monemia and Jacob McKoy. She was the middle child of 15. Her parents were slaves belonging to Jabez McKoy whose plantation was located about ten miles from Whiteville, a town in Columbus County, North Carolina. The twins were joined at the lower backbone and had one pelvis. They had two upper bodies and two sets of arms and legs. Millie-Christine had two hearts and two brains and each could carry on a conversation with a different person. Each set of arms were sensitive only to Millie or Christine, but her legs were sensitive to both of them. Their brains worked independently of each other and they played together like any other sisters might, but they thought of themselves as one person, and hyphenated their name to reflect this belief. It was probably their mom, Monemia, that began calling the girls by one name, usually “Sister”. She often referred to Millie-Christine as her child rather than as her children.

Owner Jabez McKoy decided that it would be wise to have the conjoined twins displayed as curiosities to earn him some money, a common practice in the 1800s. He entered into an agreement with John C. Purvis, a man from South Carolina, in which he would receive a quarter of the proceeds from the twins’ exhibition. At some point Purvis was replaced by Mr. Brower, and finally Joseph Pearson Smith, both from Wadesboro NC. The twins lived with Smith and his family and were educated by his wife.

Millie-Christine definitely lived an eventful life, being kidnapped twice before they reached six years old. Throughout their lives they traveled worldwide and performed to great acclaim. They sang and recited poetry, much of it their own work. While in England, they even performed for Queen Victoria.

Their life may have been glamorous, but on the other hand, they were constantly under scrutiny. Most of their performances were preceded by medical exams, and they were often away from their family for months at a time.

In the 1880s Millie and Christine were in their early thirties, and able to slow their business career and move back to Columbus County. They had inherited the Jabez McKoy farm where they were born, from their father, who purchased the property several years before. Millie-Christine toured sporadically for the next few years, but began to enjoy longer stays at home.

In 1911, Millie contracted tuberculosis and died October 8, 1912. Twelve hours later Christine died. The twins were buried on the family property. In 1969, the graves were relocated to Welches Creek Community Cemetery.

1. Would Millie-Christine have wanted to be separated if that had been possible? Why or why not?
2. What were the challenges faced by Millie-Christine?
3. What were the challenges faced by Millie-Christine's family?
4. Why do you think that Millie-Christine thought of herself as one person?
5. How did people view people who were different or who had handicaps in the 19th century?

Chang–Eng Bunker

Instructions :

After reading the short biography contrast

Millie–Christine with Chang–Eng.

Chang and Eng Bunker were born May 11, 1811 in Meklong, Siam, a country we know today as Thailand. Their mother's name was Nok, their father's name was Ti-eye, and they parented the children who would become the original Siamese Twins. Chang and Eng were connected at the chest, and only shared feeling in this area of their bodies. Though they had very distinctive personalities and would go on to have separate wives, they referred to themselves in first person and signed their names as one person; hyphenated Chang-Eng.

When they were 13, the twins were noticed by a British merchant traveling in Siam named Robert Hunter. Robert became very intrigued with the boys, and asked an American friend, Captain Abel Coffin, to share the money made by displaying the boys as oddities in sideshows in the US and England. But first, he had to convince their mom and the king to say ok. Robert promised to pay both Chang-Eng and their mother for the boys' performances and with that, Chang-Eng was off to debut in Boston Massachusetts, USA.

At first people didn't know what to think of the twins. Some were scared and, some couldn't believe their eyes... but they always came to see them again...and before long Chang-Eng was famous. The twins toured across the US and England with tour manager James Hale until they were 21 years old; this was the year they were no longer bound to work for Captain Coffin. Around this time the boys decided to work for themselves, got a new tour manager named Charles Harris, and with him, Chang-Eng continued to travel and appear in shows for several more years.

They became naturalized US citizens in October of 1839 and at age 28, the twins retired from show business and moved to Wilkes County, North Carolina. It was here that Chang-Eng met two sisters, Adelaide and Sarah Yates, and in April 1843, they were married. Over the next 31 years, the two couples had 21 kids and two farms to take care of, keeping the twins pretty busy. They tried their hands at show business once more, this time bringing a few of their kids along for the ride, until 1870, when they decided it was time to move back home.

Chang-Eng passed away in their home in Wilkes County on January 17, 1874. Even though they're gone, Chang-Eng hasn't been forgotten. To learn more about the twins and others they knew; check out what the North Carolina State Archives has online to help tell the stories of their lives.

How were these twins different from Millie-Christine?